DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 343 CS 209 042

AUTHOR Stamm, Keith R.
TITLE Effects of the Bush/Ferraro Debate on Candidate Characterization.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (68th, Memphis, TN, August 3-6, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; *Debate; *Mass Media Effects; *Persuasive Discourse; *Political Attitudes; Public Opinion; *Television Research; Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS *Audience Response; Bush (George); Ferraro (Geraldine); Political Campaigns; *Political Candidates; Vice Presidents

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the cognitive effects on viewers of the debate between vice-presidential candidates George Bush and Geraldine Ferraro. Adult passengers (N=468) on the Washington State ferries were interviewed, 191 before the debate and 277 afterward. Of those interviewed after the debate, 168 reported watching the debate and 108 said they had not. Respondents were asked to select from a list of 12 attributes those that applied to the candidate in question, to associate each relevant attribute with a characterization of the candidate, and to complete questions regarding political party orientation. The results indicated that, after the debate, viewers more often saw Bush as "aggressive," "insensitive," "manipulative," "experienced," "a good speaker," and "shallow." After the debate viewers more often thought of Ferraro as "insensitive," "intelligent," and "compassionate." Thus, impressions of Bush appeared more subject to change, and the changes were often on attributes with negative connotations. The differences in characterization/attribute (C/A) relations were mostly between the before group and the postdebate viewer group, suggesting direct effects of viewing the debate. The observed changes in C/A relations suggest that there was no clearcut "winner" or "loser," as may have been intimated by the media. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

T & M DIVISION

ED259343

Effects of the Bush/Ferraro Debate on Candidate Characterization

Keith R. Stamm
School of Communications
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Keith R. Stamm
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS209042

Cognitive effects of the Bush/Ferraro debate were assessed by a before/after survey employing a "process" concept of candidate image. The new concept gave voter's cognitions of candidates a significant place within the notion of an informed electorate by postulating that voters, as active cognizers, expand on the meaning of candidate/attribute relations. A two-stage cognitive process was defined in which the voter engages in:

(1) Attribution -- assigning relevant attributes to the candidate (e.g., Bush "good speaker"); and

(2) Characterization -- constructing meaning from candidate/attribute relations (e.g., "manipulative" makes Ferraro a danger).

Survey taken before and after the debate included two independent samples of adults riding the Washington State Ferries (Total N = 468). Ten ferry runs were randomly selected from the schedule 3 days before and and 3 days following the debate. Respondents were selected systematically by taking a random starting point and distributing questionnaires to each rider until 12 questionnaires had been distributed by each member of the interview team.

Respondents were provided with a list of 12 attributes and asked to first indicate which of these they thought applied to the candidate. Second, for each designated candidate/attribute relation they were asked to circle a characterization (or characterizations) which indicated what the relation told them about the candidate.

Comparison of the before sample with viewers of the debate provided evidence of change in both attibutions and characterizations. Bush attributions seemed particularly subject to change. After the

debate he was more often seen as "aggressive," "insensitive," "manipulative," "experienced," "good speaker," and "shallow." Ferraro was more often seen as "insensitive," "intelligent," and "compassionate." After the debate both candidates were more often characterized in terms of tool value (i.e., useful for something) and in terms of risk. They were also differences between candidates: for example, Bush received more quality characterizations than Ferraro for being "experienced" while Ferraro received more quality characterizations for being "personable" and "compassionate." Effects of the debate on these cognitive processes were also found to differ according to sex and party identification of the viewer.

Theory and Methodology Division

EFFECTS OF THE BUSH/FERRARO DEBATE ON CANDIDATE CHARACTERIZATION

K. R. Stamm

School of Communications

University of Washington

Seattle, WA 98195

1-206-543-2660

EFFECTS OF THE BUSH/FERRARO DEBATE ON CANDIDATE CHARACTERIZATION[1]

The presidential campaign of 1984 provided researchers with a unique media event -- the first televised debate involving a female vice presidential candidate. This study sought to document effects of that debate using a new approach to describing how voters think about political candidates.

There are many questions that might be raised about such a debate. What kinds of communication effects could be anticipated? Should one look for impacts on candidate liking, on voting intentions, or for cognitive effects? Previous studies of presidential debates (reviewed by Katz & Feldman, 1962; see also Miller & MacKuen, 1979) indicate that the predominant effects of debates are on cognitions, particularly cognitions involving candidates and their associated attributes (so-called "images").

Assuming that such cognitive effects can be observed in the context of this debate, what significance do they have? Would such effects bear any relationship to the idea of "informed voters"? What relationship might the anticipated cognitive effects have to party affiliation. And what difference, if any, does it make that one of the debators is female? Will that result in differences in effect according to sex of the viewer? Finally, we might ask whether one has to be an actual viewer of the debates to be affected by them. Studies of previous presidential debates have suggested that the secondary effects of post-debate commentary, newspaper accounts, and the like may also be substantial (Tannenbaum, 1962; Lang and Lang, 1978).

[1]The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of several graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Washington. The study could not have been undertaken without their assistance with interviewing and coding. Special thanks are owed Alice Burgess and Suan Lim for coordination of field interviews and coding.

Research on the effects of previous presidential debates suggests that changes in voters' cognitions about candidates (e.g., candidate "images") is a common effect of debates. A major review of studies of the 1960 Kennedy/Nixon debates concluded that the primary effect was to clarify the images some voters held of the candidates (Katz & Feldman, 1962). The effects of the 1976 debates appeared to be less marked, but again a recurrent finding was that the debates influenced cognitions of the candidates (Miller & MacKuen, 1979; Lang and Lang, 1978; Becker, et al., 1978; Nimmo, et al., 1978).

While change in cognitions of candidates has been a commonly observed effect, it has sometimes been assigned secondary importance. In this view learning of candidate's issue positions, when it occurs, is a more important effect. For example, Chaffee (1978), concluded that debates, rather than supplying manifest issue information, serve simply to project appealing images of the candidates. Graber and Kim (1978) explained that voters did not learn much from the 1976 debates because learning was limited to perceptions of candidates. The observer's conception of the "informed voter" seems to favor issue knowledge--i.e., knowing what the issues are, and the positions of candidates on important issues (Blumler, 1983).

Why should some researchers take such a demeaning view of the importance of candidate cognitions? According to Bennett (1980), traditional views of the communication functions of elections dismiss person-focused information as a perversion of true campaign standards. In the place of serious issues, debates (and other communication vehicles) are seen as offering little more than personalities. Such messages are thought not to be informative in any significant way.

Not all observers have agreed with this point of view. Tannenbaum, et al. (1962) considered impact on image to be a major concern. Miller, et al. (1979) observed that voter perceptions of candidate attributes has become

increasingly important in determining election outcomes. Despite finding that the 1976 debates had little impact on issue cognitions, they concluded that the debates made a significant contribution to producing a better informed electorate.

Without denying the importance of issue information, we can ask whether so-called "candidate images" have utility to voters. Bennett says that the display of powerful personal images is an important election "ritual." It serves to translate private concerns into public images, and shape public perceptions of ongoing reality. Thus, we might see the voter as an active "thinker," not just a passive receptacle for televised images. In this view, the meaning of candidate images is not in the images themselves, but is added through cognitive processes of the voter.

Evidence of an "active" cognitive process based on candidate images has been reported by Lang and Lang (1962) and Miller and MacKuen (1979). These researchers see voters going beyond the immediate image projected, interpreting it and deriving implications. According to Lang and Lang debate viewers looked for "signs" which they could relate to the candidate's ability to perform, to his fitness for a political role, and to his "quality" as a human being. Such signs included not only what the candidate said, but how. Likewise, Miller and MacKuen reported that a candidate's debate performance suggested to voters how that candidate might operate in office.

It can therefore be argued that there are grounds for regarding candidate cognitions as an important component of political communication. On that basis there is justification for examining possible changes in candidate cognitions as a significant effect of political debates. However, the literature also suggests that the scope of observation be broadened to include cognitive processing of image content--i.e., what additional meaning is given to information so received?

Conceptual Framework

It was suggested above that study of the 1984 vice presidential debates should attempt to move beyond previous studies of candidate image by including the viewer's cognitive processing of image content. While the literature offers no guidelines for doing so, there appears to be growing dissatisfaction with prevailing conceptions of candidate image. The crux of this dissatisfaction seems to be that current concepts are too static. They provide "still pictures" of the end products of cognizing, but they do not capture process. Reeves, et al. (1982) concluded that there is now enough interest in political cognitions to become seriously concerned with processing mechanisms. According to Carter (1978), current concepts of political cognition reflect primarily voters' ability to learn (to "image") from outside information sources, but not voters' ability to construct (to "imagine") their own ideas.

Applying this to the vice presidential debate, it means that the concern would not be limited to how the debate might affect candidate images. The candidate image can also be used as a basis for thinking about the candidate--e.g., by trying to surmise (on that basis) what the candidate might do in office.

Swanson (1981) has raised a similar point in his call for a "constructivist" approach to political communication. He says that researchers have ignored what is essential to candidate imagery--interpretation, or the ways people construct a meaningful image. In other words, what is meaningful about an image is the connections and/or associations that can be made.

The ideas of these authors provided a perspective from which to develop a more processual concept of candidate cognition. The focus of this concept is to permit cognizing in which the voter is actively constructing, providing his/her own associations for candidate/attribute relations. It is not an alternative to the conventional image concept, but a way of adding process to it.

In the cognizing of a political candidate, two cognitive steps are taken by the actor:

(1) actor (e.g., voter) assigns a relevant attribute to the candidate--e.g., "Lincoln is honest." In many image studies the attributes are assigned a priori by an observer, as in the use of bipolar adjectives scales. But consistent with a constructive approach it is important that this represent a cognitive step taken by the actor.

(2) The candidate/attribute (C/A) relation is reviewed by the actor to yield an interpretation--e.g., "that's what makes Lincoln special." The second step in this sequence has been termed "characterization" of the candidate. In this characterization step the actor goes beyond the C/A relation, associating it with other objects, events and/or conditions. This makes the initial C/A relation more informative to the actor.

Some previous studies in which candidate attributes were elicited on an open-end basis have provided evidence that C/A relations have additional implications, although it is impossible in these studies to separate the actor's meaning from meaning imputed by the observer. A recent Q-sort study identified C/A clusters which appeared to be associated with probable "actions" of the candidate, while other C/A relations could be associated with a "political style" (Nimmo & Savage, 1976). In another study the attributes associated with Ford and Carter seemed to suggest either personal qualities, or capability to perform a political role (Lang and Lang, 1978). Groupings of C/A relations identified by Miller and MacKuen (1979) were suggestive of leadership quality, personal traits, and competence.

For purposes of research, six modes of candidate characterization were identified that would lend additional meaning to a C/A relation (Stamm, et al., 1984). These modes were a joint product of recent work by Carter (1984), and of extensive pretesting. In the pretests respondents were asked to

provide C/A relations, then to indicate what each C/A relation told them about the candidate. The six modes of characterization are:

(1) Identifier--the C/A relation is used as a basis for recognizing the candidate;

(2) Tool--the C/A relation suggests that the candidate will be useful for accomplishing something, a means to some end;

(3) Quality--the C/A relation makes the candidate special or distinctive;

(4) Failing--the C/A relation points to a weakness in the candidate, makes the candidate useless;

(5) Risk--makes the candidate unpleasurable;

(6) Danger--makes the candidate a threat (i.e., candidates with such an attribute are associated with harmful consequences).

The author makes no claim that these six modes exhaust the possible meanings that might be associated with various C/A relations. The initial intention was to provide a descriptive tool capable of detecting between-candidate differences in characterization. A preliminary study of characterizations of presidential primary candidates (Stamm, et al., 1984) demonstrated that there were major differences in how these candidates were characterized on each of 12 attributes.

In the present study it was expected that the vice presidential debate would result in changes in both the attributes that are assigned to the candidates, and in the resulting characterizations. It was further anticipated that the extent and direction of these changes will be influenced by the respondent's party orientation and sex.

Methods

Effects of the debate on candidate cognitions were measured by surveying independent samples of eligible voters before and after the debate. A total of 468 adults riding the Washington State Ferries were interviewed, 191 of them 1-3 days before the debate and 277 1-3 days afterward. Of those interviewed after the debate, 169 reported watching the debate and 108 said they had not.

In the analysis of debate effects comparisons were made between the before group and both post-debate groups. The interpretation of these comparisons, however, is not quite straightforward.

Differences between the before group and the post-debate viewers gives the best indication of changes in characterizations due to debate viewing. But one cannot easily untangle these effects from possible indirect effects due to secondary exposure to post-debate analysis, newspaper coverage, interpersonal discussion, etc. Previous studies of presidential debates have intimated that such indirect effects may be appreciable (Tannenbaum, 1962; Becker, et al., 1978; Lang and Lang, 1978).

Comparisons between the before group and the post-debate nonviewers provide evidence for indirect effects, but this evidence cannot be tied to a specific secondary source. The nonviewer group does not serve as an effective control group due to the impossibility of preventing indirect exposure to the debates through secondary sources.

An effort was made to prevent systematic differences arising between the before and after groups due to sampling biases. Upon boarding the ferry interviewers were instructed to select random starting points, then to distribute questionnaires to every person until 12 had been distributed. On some ferries questionnaires were distributed to most passengers, but on heavily travelled runs only a fourth or less. Less than 10 percent of the passengers approached refused, or terminated part way through the questionnaire. In fact most passengers gave the questionnaire considerable thought, and many

volunteered positive comments when it was collected.

Of particular concern was the possibility of systematic differences in sex and/or political orientation among the three (experimental) groups. This could result in before/after differences that were not due to the debate. Table 1 reveals that there were not significant between-group differences in either political orientations or sex, but there was some tendency for the post-debate viewer group to be slightly older and higher in education than the non-viewer group. These differences were not unexpected, and not great cause for concern, as previous studies had shown they were unrelated to debate effects (cf., Becker, et al., 1978).

The questionnaire began with a list of 12 attributes selected from previous studies of presidential images (Nimmo and Savage, 1976) and from a recent study of presidential primary candidates (Stamm, et al., 1984). The respondents' first task was to indicate which, if any, of the adjective listed applied to the candidate in question. The 12 adjectives were: aggressive, personable, intelligent, insensitive, vague, manipulative, compassionate, experienced, indecisive, good speaker, shallow, professional. In addition to these, the respondents were encouraged to add others. Some respondents did add to the list, but there was no discernible pattern to the volunteered attributes, so they were not included in the analysis.

The second stage of the questionnaire allowed respondents to associate each relevant attribute with a characterization of the candidate. Respondents were instructed to circle as many as they found applicable to each C/A relation they had already indicated:

> "How does each word or words give meaning or significance to the person? How does it characterize him/her for you?"

The six characterization modes had been previously described and illustrated on the first page of the questionnaire. "Lincoln/honest" was used as an example:

Identifier — makes Lincoln easy to recognize.
Tool — makes Lincoln useful for something.
Quality — makes Lincoln valued or special.
Failing -- makes Lincoln inadequate.
Risk — makes Lincoln unpredictable.
Danger -- makes Lincoln a threat.

A brief explanation of each mode was also included at the top of the two pages on which respondents were asked to construct their cognitions of George Bush and Geraldine Ferraro. Almost all respondents were able to complete this part of the questionnaire on their own after some preliminary instructions.

Of the remaining questions, only those on party orientation require explanation. Due to questions that have recently been raised about the unidimensionality of party identification as measured by the traditional item (cf., Shively, 1980), separate items were included for Democrat, Republican, and Independent. Using a cognitive approach developed by Elway (1983), individuals were asked to respond on a five-point scale (1 = does not fit at all; 5 = fits exactly) to three statements: "I categorize myself as a Democrat" (Republican) (Independent).

The six-page questionnaire took most respondents about 15 minutes to complete, although some worked on it for a half-hour or even longer.

Results and Discussion

What impact, if any, did the vice presidential debate have on characterizations of George Bush and Geraldine Ferraro? Were the effects largely direct, or both direct and indirect? Did effects differ by sex and political orientation of the eligible voter?

This study found that there were significant before/after differences in the frequency of attribute assignments (Tables 2 & 3). These differences

occurred more often for Bush than Ferraro, and provided evidence of both direct and indirect effects on C/A relations.

Compared to the before group, post-debate viewers more often saw Bush as "aggressive," "insensititve," "manipulative," "experienced," "good speaker," and "shallow" (Table 2). After the debate viewers more often thought of Ferraro as "insensitive," "intelligent," and "compassionate" (Table 3). Thus, impressions of Bush appeared more subject to change, and the changes which did occur were often on attributes with negative connotations.

The differences in C/A relations were mostly between the before group and the post-debate viewer group, suggesting direct effects of viewing the debate. But there were some exceptions. In the case of Bush, both post-debate groups (viewers and nonviewers) were different from the before group on the attributes "aggressive," "insensitive," and "shallow." Turning to Ferraro, post-debate nonviewers most often saw Ferraro as "insensitive." The tendency for the nonviewer groups to be more like the post-debate viewer group than the before group suggests that an indirect effect of the debate may be involved.[2]

[2] i.e., the nonviewer differences often arose when there was also a viewer difference in the same direction. Of particular interest are those cases where the nonviewer difference is the larger of the two. Such differences may well represent indirect effects rather than self-selection artifacts.

It may also be an artifact of self-selection--i.e., those who see the candidates as "aggressive," "insensitive," and/or "shallow" being less likely to watch the debate. Unfortunately, neither possibility can be ruled out. No information was collected on post-debate interpersonal discussion, attention to radio and television commentaries or newspaper coverage, etc. At the least the evidence here points to the need for systematic efforts to document indirect effects separately from direct effects.

Given the evidence of changes in C/A relations, the question arises whether these changes served to increase or decrease differences between the candidates. The answer is that both kinds of changes occurred, sometimes to the advantage of Bush and sometimes to the advantage of Ferraro (Table 4). Before the debate, Bush more often than Ferraro was seen as "insensitive," "shallow," and "professional." These differences were greater after the debate for "insensitive," and "shallow," but smaller in the case of "professional." Ferraro was the one more often thought of as "aggressive," "intelligent," "compassionate," and "good speaker." On five out of the 12 attributes existing differences in C/A relations did not change; notably, Ferraro remained the "personable" candidate and Bush the one with "experience."

The observed changes in C/A relations suggest that there was no clearcut "winner" or "loser," as may have been intimated in post-debate media coverage. All we can say at this point is that descriptions of the candidates appeared to change. One can read positive and negative connotations into these changes, but the objective here was to find out from the respondent what these descriptions (C/A relations) meant. Along with changes in the descriptions of the candidates we might also expect some changes in how they were characterized.

Changes in modes of characterization were first analyzed in the aggregate--i.e., by summing the frequency of each mode across all C/A relations for each candidate. Comparison of the index scores showed that there were some overall

differences in characterizations after the debate, but not all of the differences could be interpreted as direct effects of the debate.

The debate effects were largely limited to tool and risk characterizations (Table 5). Tool characterizations increased for both candidates -- i.e., debate viewers more often thought about them in terms of what they could do. After the debate both candidates were more often associated with risk, but in the case of Ferraro this difference was limited to nonviewers. If the latter difference was due to the debate, it could only be an indirect effect. It also appeared that the debate increased the number of meanings associated with each C/A relation as reflected in the higher frequency of doubles (e.g., two characterization modes for each C/A relation). With Bush this difference was most pronounced among debate viewers, while for Ferraro it was more apparent as an indirect effect.

The tendency for nonviewers to construct more risk characterizations for Ferraro and more risk and danger characterizations for Bush suggests an interesting indirect effect. These differences could be due to self-selection, but it seems unlikely since there was at the same time some evidence for direct effects. It is tempting to speculate that second-hand exposure to the debates works something like rumor transmission; the candidate's image is "sharpened" by focusing on the risk and danger associations. To get a better understanding of indirect effects, it would be extremely useful to find out what nonviewers want to find out about the debates, if anything, and what viewers want to pass on. What information is exchanged in interpersonal discussions after the debate?

Along with examining aggregate differences in characterization modes, evidence of debate effects was examined separately for each C/A relation (table not shown). This inspection showed that the same attribute had different meanings depending on the candidate it was assigned to, and that the meanings of some attributes changed as a consequence of the debate.

Between-candidate differences in the meaning of attributes were considerable before the debate. Following are just a few examples:

* "aggressive" was used most often to identify Ferraro, while "experienced" was used more often to identify Bush.

* "aggressive" and "intelligent" more often resulted in tool characterizations when linked to Bush. "Compassionate" resulted in a higher proportion of tool characterizations for Ferraro.

* "insensitive" and "shallow" more often made Ferraro distinctive (quality), but "indecisive" made Bush distinctive while making Ferraro a risk.

* "shallow" and "manipulative," when assigned to Ferraro, were associated with danger. When linked to Bush, these same attributes implied risk and failing, but not danger.

After the debate, some of the attributes seemed to have changed in meaning--i.e., they were used to characterize the candidates somewhat differently. Again, several examples can be given:

* both "experienced" and "good speaker" were used to construct a higher proportion of tool characterizations than before the debate.

* although more people saw Bush as "compassionate" after the debate, a lower proportion associated this attribute with quality; for Ferraro "compassionate" the proportion of quality characterizations remained the same.

* after the debate "vague" and "indecisive" were less often associated with failings of the candidates. In the case of Bush, a higher proportion of failing characterizations resulted from the attribute "shallow."

* the attribute "indecisive" produced considerably more risk characterizations of Bush after the debate.

* the attributes "insensitive," "manipulative" and "indecisive" were more often used to characterize the candidates as a danger.

The differences in characterization of the candidates after the debate centered around just a few attributes. "Compassionate" was more often a quality of Ferraro, and "experienced" more often a quality of Bush. Bush now had more failing characterizations than Ferraro for being "insensitive," and Ferraro more combined characterizations (tool/quality) for being "personable" and "compassionate."

Having presented evidence that the debate did have an impact on which attributes were assigned to the candidates, and on what these attributes meant, the question remaining is whether the impact differed by sex and political orientation of the respondent. Differences in impact by sex were of particular interest to see whether the debate enhanced differences by sex existing before the debate, or perhaps reduced them. The latter effect would be suggestive of a breakdown in sex-linked stereotyping of the candidates.

Tables 6 and 7 show that there were differential effects by sex on C/A relations for both candidates. The debate apparently increased the proportion of males thinking of Bush as "aggressive," "manipulative," and "good speaker" with no comparable effect on females. Females less often thought of Bush as "intelligent" after the debate. Both males and females more often thought of Bush as "insensitive" after the debate.

As for Ferraro, the debate appeared to have more impact on males than females. Compared to before the debate, male viewers more often thought of Ferraro as "aggressive," "compassionate," and "professional." Both male and female debate viewers more often thought of her as "intelligent."

The net result of these changes was to increase differences between males and females in how they thought of Bush; generally, males became more favorable, females less favorable. But where Ferraro was concerned the effect of the debate was to reduce differences by sex; males tended to increase the number of positive C/A relations, while females remained the same or decreased slightly. Therefore, it can be inferred that Ferraro achieved some success in breaking down male stereotyping.

The debate also had different effects on how the candidates were characterized by males and females (Tables 8 & 9). With respect to Bush the use of identifier and tool characterizations increased among males, but not among females. Female non-viewers characterized Bush as a danger more often

than any other group. Turning to Ferraro, the use of tool characterizations increased among male viewers to the point where males now saw her attributes as useful more often than females (Table 9). On the other hand, the tendency for males to more often characterize Ferraro as failing and being a risk was just as pronounced after the debate.

Turning last to results by political orientation, it is very apparent that changes in candidate cognitions did depend upon party identification. "Strong" Republicans more often (than "weak" Republicans, or Democrats) changed toward thinking of Bush as "aggressive," "experienced," and "good speaker." Curiously, it was Republicans (both "weak" and "strong") who more often thought of Bush as "shallow" after the debate. The debate appeared to affect Ferraro's image among both "weak" and "strong" Democrats. "Strong" Democrat debate viewers more often saw Ferraro as "compassionate," but in other cases it was "weak" Democrats among the debate viewers that more often saw her as "intelligent" and "insensitive."

Table 10 also shows that differences in C/A relations from before to after the debate remained when party orientation was introduced as a control. Thus, it is reasonable to maintain that previously discussed differences between study groups were "real," not artifacts of the association between cognition and party identification. For example, the tendency for debate viewers to more often think of Bush as a "good speaker," and as "shallow" held regardless of party orientation.

Party orientation also had a strong mediating influence on characterizations of the candidates, but again evidence of debate effects remained after controls for party orientation were introduced (Table 11). Differences in characterization by party were evident for both candidates. Those Democratically oriented constructed fewer tool and quality characterizations from Bush's attributes, while Repulicans constructed more quality characterizations and fewer

failing and risk characterizations. The pattern was reversed on Ferraro Now Democrats constructed more quality and more tool/quality combinations with fewer failing, risk and danger characterizations, and Republicans did just the opposite.

In almost all cases these differences by party orientation were orthogonal to effects of the debate. Only two interactions were found, the more interesting one representing a tendency for Bush danger characterizations to increase more among debate viewers who were "strong" Democrats.

Summing up, what can we say about the effects of the Bush/Ferraro debate on candidate cognitions? First, there was evidence for two kinds of cognitive effects. The debate not only influenced which attributes were assigned to each candidate, but it also modified the meaning of C/A relations. Secondly, the direction of these effects was strongly mediated by both sex and party orientation. Sex differences in candidate cognitions were sometimes enhanced (particularly in the case of Bush), and occasionally reduced or eliminated, suggesting that this debate did play at least a minor role in breaking down sex-linked stereotypes of the female candidate. Differences by party orientation were generally increased by the debate, although there were occasional tendencies to think worse of the own-party candidate and to think better of the other-party candidate.

The most troubling question concerns the difficulty of separating direct from indirect effects of the debate. Evidence was obtained which suggested that the indirect effects of the debate might have been quite different from the direct effects. Previous investigators have speculated along similar lines. It would seem that a priority for future debate studies should be detailed observation of secondary exposure on the part of both debate viewers and nonviewers. This would not only allow analysis of indirect effects, but certain kinds of secondary exposure (e.g. interpersonal discussion) can also be considered as a communication effect of the debate(s

Bibliography

1. Becker, Lee, Idown Sobowole, Robin Cobbey and Chaim Eyal, Debates' effects on voters' understanding of candidates and issues," In George Bishop, Robert Meadow and Marilyn Jackson-Beeck (Eds.) The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral and Policy Perspectives (NY: Praeger, 1978).

2. Bennett, Lance, "Myth, ritual, and political control," J. of Communication 30(4): 166-79, 1980.

3. Carter, Richard, "Some effects of the debates," in S. Kraus (Ed.) The Great Debates (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1962).

4. Carter, Richard, "A very peculiar horserace," in Bishop, et al., op. cit.

5. Carter, Richard, "Communication situations," Unpublished notes, 1984.

6. Chaffee, Steven, "Are debates useful to voters?" Communication Monographs 45 (1978), 328-346.

7. Graber, D. and Kim, Y., "Why John Q. Voter did not learn much from the 1976 presidential debates," in B. Ruben (Ed.), Communication Yearbook 2 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1978).

8. Katz, E. and J.J. Feldman, "The great debates in the light of research: a survey of surveys," in S. Kraus (Ed.), The Great Debates. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1962.

9. Lang, Kurt and Gladys Lang, "Reactions of viewers," in S. Kraus, op. cit.

10. Lang, Gladys and Kurt Lang, "The formation of public opinion: direct and mediated effects of the first debate," in Bishop, et al., op. cit.

11. Miller, A. and M. MacKuen, "Learning about the candidates: the 1976 presidential debates," Public Opinion Quart. 43, 1979, pp. 326-346.

12. Nimmo, D. and R.L. Savage, Candidates and Their Images. Pacific Palisades: Goodyear Publishing, 1976.

13. Nimmo, Dan, Michael Mansfield and James Curry, "Persistance and change in candidate images," in Bishop, et al., op. cit.

14. Reeves, B., S. Chaffee & A. Tims, "Social cognition and mass communication research," in E. Roloff and C. Berger (Eds.), Social Cognition and

Communication. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982.

15. Stamm, Keith, Alice Burgess, Michael Jordan and Suan Lim, "Voters' characterizations of presidential candidates: a constructivist approach to political communication," presented to Political Communication Division, International Communication Association, Honolulu, 1985.

16. Swanson, D.L., "A constructivist approach," in Nimmo & Saunders (Eds.) Handbook of Political Communication (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981).

17. Tannenbaum, Percy, Bradley Greenberg and Fred Silverman, "Candidate images," in S. Kraus (Ed.), op. cit.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of experimental groups.

		After		
Political orientation	Before	Non-viewers	Viewers	p<
Democratic	2.70	2.59	2.84	ns*
Republican	2.66	2.54	2.63	ns*
Independent	3.31	3.31	3.30	ns*
Age	38.80 (a)	34.10 (a)	42.30 (b)	.001*
Education	4.71(a)	4.40(b)	4.86(a)	.01*
Percent Male	62	58	67	ns**
Percent Female	38	42	33	
	191	108	169	

* Difference tested by F-test

** Relationship tested by Chisquare

Table 2. Percent relevance of attributes to Bush by experimental groups.

Attribute	Before	After		p<*
		Non-Viewer	Viewer	
Aggressive	29.3%(a)	38.0 (b)	48.5 (c)	.01
Personable	46.1	37.0	36.7	ns
Intelligent	70.7	61.1	68.0	ns
Insensitive	16.8 (a)	27.8 (b)	34.9 (b)	.001
Vague	35.6	36.1	41.4	ns
Manipulative	17.8 (a)	25.9 (a)	33.1 (b)	.01
Compassionate	13.1	13.0	13.0	ns
Experienced	64.9 (a)	64.8 (a)	74.6 (b)	.05
Indecisive	14.7	18.5	22.5	ns
Good Speaker	34.0 (a)	41.7 (a)	51.5 (b)	.01
Shallow	14.7 (a)	30.6 (b)	30.2 (b)	.001
Professional	62.8	52.8	56.2	ns
	191	108	169	

* Significance levels are for pooled Chisquare. Superscripts indicate groups that are significantly different at the .05 level.

Table 3. Percent relevance of attributes to Ferraro by experimental groups.

Attribute	Before	After		p<*
		Non-Viewer	Viewer	
Aggressive	75.4%	82.4	78.7	ns
Personable	64.4	57.4	63.9	ns
Intelligent	77.0 (a)	76.9 (a)	89.3 (b)	.01
Insensitive	9.9 (a)	19.4 (b)	13.6 (ab)	.10
Vague	18.3	18.5	21.3	ns
Manipulative	27.2	28.7	29.0	ns
Compassionate	39.8 (a)	38.0 (a)	52.1 (b)	.05
Experienced	40.3	33.3	45.0	ns
Indecisive	12.6	13.0	11.8	ns
Good Speaker	63.4	60.2	65.7	ns
Shallow	12.6	17.6	17.1	ns
Professional	52.9	58.3	59.2	ns
	191	169	108	

* Significance levels are for pooled Chisquare. Superscripts indicate groups that are different at the .05 level.

Table 4. Percent between-candidate differences in relative attribute assignment by experimental group.

Attribute	Before	After: Non-Viewer	After: Viewer
Aggressive	46% F*	44 F	30 F
Personable	18 F	20 F	27 F
Intelligent	6 F	16 F	21 F
Insensitive	7 B	8 B	21 B
Vague	17 B	18 B	20 B
Manipulative	9 F	3 F	4 B
Compassionate	27 F	25 F	39 F
Experienced	25 B	32 B	30 B
Indecisive	2 B	6 B	11 B
Good speaker	29 F	19 F	14 F
Shallow	2 B	13 B	13 B
Professional	10 B	6 F	3 F
	191	108	169

* Indicates whether the higher frequency is associated with Ferraro (F) or Bush (B). For example, the first entry indicates that "aggressive" was associated with Ferraro 46% more often that it was associated with Bush.

Table 5. Mean use of characterization modes by group and candidate.

BUSH

Cognitive Mode	Before	After: Non-Viewers	After: Viewers	p<*
Identify	.47 (a)	.24 (b)	.56 (a)	.02
Tool	.73 (a)	.82 (a)	1.01 (b)	.05
Quality	1.07	.91	1.01	ns
Failing	.53	.60	.59	ns
Risk	.29 (a)	.52 (b)	.43 (b)	.04
Danger	.12 (a)	.30 (b)	.21 (a)	ns
Doubles	.57 (a)	.73 (a)	.86 (b)	ns
Multiples	.38	.31	.40	ns
	191	108	169	

FERRARO

Cognitive Mode	Before	After: Non-Viewers	After: Viewers	p<*
Identify	.64	.46	.59	ns
Tool	.76 (a)	.92 (a)	1.03 (b)	ns
Quality	1.22	1.26	1.30	ns
Failing	.44 (a)	.23 (b)	.44 (a)	ns
Risk	.32 (a)	.48 (b)	.30 (a)	ns
Danger	.20	.15	.27	ns
Doubles	.60 (a)	1.06 (b)	.79 (a)	.02
Multiples	.75 (a)	.32 (b)	.60 (a)	.06
	191	108	169	

* Significance levels are for F-test across all three groups. Group means with different superscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$ (by T-test).

Table 6. Percent relevance of Bush attributes by group and sex.

	MALE:			FEMALE:			
Attribute	Before	Non-Viewer	Viewer	Before	Non-Viewer	Viewer	p<*
Aggressive	30.7	45.2	54.9	23.9	28.9	34.5	.001 ns
Personable	45.6	38.7	36.3	47.9	33.3	36.4	ns ns
Intelligent	70.2	69.4	74.3	73.2	48.9	54.5	ns .02
Insensitive	17.5	32.3	32.7	15.5	22.2	38.2	.02 .01
Vague	31.6	33.9	37.2	42.3	37.8	50.9	ns ns
Manipulative	15.8	25.8	36.3	21.1	26.7	25.5	.002 ns
Compassionate	14.9	14.5	13.3	11.3	11.1	10.9	ns ns
Experienced	68.4	72.6	78.8	62.0	55.6	65.5	ns ns
Indicisive	14.0	14.5	21.2	16.9	24.4	25.5	ns ns
Good speaker	33.3	46.8	60.2	36.6	35.6	32.7	.001 ns
Shallow	15.8	33.9	28.3	14.1	26.7	34.5	.01 .03
Professional	67.5	56.5	60.2	57.7	46.7	47.3	ns ns
N =	114	62	113	71	45	55	

* The top value in each row is the significance level of Chisquare for males, the bottom value the significance level for females.

Table 7. Percent relevance of Ferraro attributes by group and sex.

	MALE:			FEMALE:			
Attribute	Before	Non-Viewer	Viewer	Before	Non-Viewer	Viewer	p<*
Aggressive	72.8	88.7	80.5	78.9	73.3	74.5	.04 ns
Personable	58.8	53.2	59.3	73.2	62.2	72.7	ns ns
Intelligent	72.8	79.0	86.7	84.5	75.6	94.5	.03 .03
Insensitive	10.5	17.7	16.8	8.5	20.0	7.3	ns .09
Vague	18.4	24.2	26.5	18.3	8.9	10.9	ns ns
Manipulative	28.9	29.0	33.6	26.8	26.7	18.2	ns ns
Compassionate	30.7	35.5	46.9	56.3	42.2	61.8	.04 ns
Experienced	32.5	33.9	43.4	50.7	33.3	47.3	ns ns
Indicisive	11.4	12.9	15.0	12.7	11.1	5.5	ns ns
Good speaker	59.6	64.5	63.7	70.4	55.6	69.1	ns ns
Shallow	14.9	17.7	22.1	7.0	17.8	7.3	ns ns
Professional	41.2	58.1	59.3	71.8	60.0	58.2	.01 ns
N =	114	62	113	71	45	55	

* The top value in each row is the significance level of Chisquare for males, the bottom value the significance level for females.

Table 8. Characterization of Bush by group and sex.

Mode of Characterization	MALE: Before	MALE: Non-Viewer	MALE: Viewer	FEMALE: Before	FEMALE: Non-Viewer	FEMALE: Viewer	p<.05 for:[1] G	S	I
Identification	.44	.26	.70	.54	.22	.27	*	-	*
Tool	.74	1.06	1.12	.65	.51	.76	*	*	-
Quality	1.17	1.11	1.12	.99	.58	.78	-	*	-
Failing	.61	.76	.55	.39	.38	.67	-	-	-
Risk	.30	.61	.47	.28	.40	.33	*	-	-
Danger	.13	.15	.21	.11	.51	.23	-	-	*
Double	.57	.53	.82	.61	1.02	.91	-	-	-
Multiple	.35	.32	.28	.46	.31	.58	-	-	-
	114	62	113	71	45	55			

[1]Results of F-test for groups (G), sex (S), interaction (I).

Table 9. Characterization of Ferraro by debate exposure and sex.

Mode of Characterization	MALE: Before	MALE: Non-Viewer	MALE: Viewer	FEMALE: Before	FEMALE: Non-Viewer	FEMALE: Viewer	p<.05 for:[1] G	S	I
Identification	.60	.40	.64	.69	.56	.51	-	-	-
Tool	.65	1.08	1.12	.83	.71	.85	*	-	-
Quality	1.21	1.26	1.33	1.27	1.29	1.27	-	-	-
Failing	.49	.29	.58	.38	.16	.18	-	*	-
Risk	.39	.55	.35	.20	.27	.18	-	*	-
Danger	.20	.18	.38	.18	.11	.05	-	-	-
Double	.49	.87	.56	.79	1.33	1.22	*	*	-
Multiple	.50	.26	.42	1.23	.42	.95	*	*	-
	114	62	113	71	45	55			

[1]Results of F-test for groups (G), sex (S), and interaction (I).

Table 10. Candidate attributes by group (with controls for political orientation).

Attributes		Zero-order: Weak	Zero-order: Strong	Controlled for: Republican	Controlled for: Democrat
Aggressive	Bush	.19	.43*	.25*	.30
	Ferraro	.11	-.05	.08	.09
Personable	Bush	-.19*	-.19	-.19*	-.10
	Ferraro	-.10	-.01	.02	-.08
Intelligent	Bush	-.22*	.19	-.16	.03
	Ferraro	.21*	.30	.34*	.22*
Insensitive	Bush	.47*	.11	.43*	.27*
	Ferraro	.21*	.02	.11	.17
Vague	Bush	.19	.00	.16	.02
	Ferraro	.13	.12	.02	.13
Manipulative	Bush	.32*	.32	.32*	.24*
	Ferraro	.12	-.03	-.05	.09
Compassionate	Bush	.03	-.09	-.01	.04
	Ferraro	-.04	.32*	.22*	.08
Experienced	Bush	.02	.35*	.07	.24*
	Ferraro	.05	-.01	.08	.03
Indecisive	Bush	.28*	.02	.24*	.11
	Ferraro	-.05	.23	-.04	.00
Good speaker	Bush	.12	.37*	.18*	.31
	Ferraro	-.02	.01	.06	-.01
Shallow	Bush	.38*	.24*	.36*	.21*
	Ferraro	.14	.21	.06	.16
Professional	Bush	-.21	-.07	-.18	-.04
	Ferraro	-.05	.18	.14	.01

[1]Table entries are gamma coefficients. First two columns show relationship of the study conditions to candidate attributes for those with "weak" and "strong" orientations to the candidates' party. The last two columns are partial gammas controlling for each party orientation.

* relationship sig. @ $p<.05$.

Table 11. F-Values: Candidate characterization by experimental group controlled for political orientation.

Characterization		Main effects of: Group(a)	Democrat(b)	Republican(b)	Interactions: G x D	G x R
BUSH:	Identifier	2.89* /3.49*	1.37	2.03	.23	.58
	Tool	2.63 /3.91*	3.65*	2.44	.85	.65
	Quality	.85 / .11	6.50**	5.59**	.66	1.21
	Failing	.88 / .07	6.75***	8.84***	.36	.49
	Risk	4.61**/1.95	11.20***	7.23***	.47	.90
	Danger	.58 /1.52	9.21***	1.01	2.45*	.53
	Double	1.92 /2.89*	2.27	.30	.51	2.22
	Multiple	.06 /1.78	.97	.96	1.51	2.81*
FERRARO:	Identifier	.67 / .37	.01	2.30	.44	.91
	Tool	2.38 /4.46**	.39	.33	.78	1.10
	Quality	.82 / .15	12.63***	6.87***	.26	.48
	Failing	1.41 /1.74	5.66**	4.66**	.34	1.27
	Risk	2.36 /2.40	6.86***	4.81**	1.02	.23
	Danger	.71 / .77	4.15**	.93	1.55	.59
	Double	2.54 /3.75*	4.87**	1.26	1.56	.81
	Multiple	7.24***/1.97	4.28**	.66	.88	1.68

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

(a) The first value in this column is the main effect of group controlled for the candidate's own party; the second value controls for the opposition party.

(b) F-values are for main effects of each party orientation.